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Jesuits in the History of India
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Goa - Dec. 2002 SEMINAR: In the Footsteps of Francis Xavier: Jesuits in India

1.01 The vast scope suggested by the title of the paper "Jesuits in Indian History" or "Jesuits in the History of India" makes it necessary to restrict its contents to a few aspects of the question; and each of these aspects in turn must be confined to limited spans of time and space.

1.02 This restraint is necessary because the Society of Jesus has been perhaps the only institution / organisation in India that has been in existence practically continuously for the past well-nigh four centuries and a half.

1.03 Also because the Society's influence has been present in one form or other in almost every region of India - not only in what is today the Republic of India, but what went by the name of India during the peak-years of the British Raj, and also areas around it, including many parts of the present day Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tibet, Ceylon, Nepal, Sikkim and other geographical and political regions and territories.

1.04 And this spread and influence of the Society in time and space has a third dimension - it had permeated a large number of spheres like religion and spirituality, politics, education, scientific and technological progress, meteorology, warfare and diplomacy, indology, culture, history, geography, language and literature, art and architecture, sports and games, discipline, morality and ethics, social reforms, tribal and aboriginal movements, dalit issues, schisms, travel and trade, nation-building, medicine and health-care, formation of youth...to mention but a few.

1.05 Thus, in evaluating the place of the Jesuits in Indian history this - at least - threefold presence of the Society must not be lost sight of - its presence 1) for almost half a millennium, 2) in every region that ever formed a part of any of the many Indias, and 3) in the dozens of fields where it has left its imprint.

1.06 Considering this vast scope of the topic, only partly outlined above, it is hoped that it will be both understood and forgiven if the paper omits much more than what it includes.

2.01 The Society of Jesus (as mentioned above) has been perhaps the only institution / organisation of any size and impact in India that has been in existence practically continuously for the past well-nigh four centuries and a half. At this stage, without entering into any detailed discussion, the mere dates of the various ruling dynasties or organisations which wielded significant power in the second half of the second millennium may be profitably scrutinised. It would be easily seen that none of the powers dominated for more than a part of, and in most cases a very small part of, the 450 years for which the Society has been working in India.

2.02 Sultan Mahmud, last of the Bahmani dynasty of the Deccan ruled from 1482 to 1528, the Sultans of Bijapur (1490 - 1686), the rulers of Vijayanagar (1336 - 1585), the Lodi dynasty (1451 - 1526), the Sur (Afghan) dynasty (1540 - 1557) , the Maratha Peshwas (1713 - 1818), the family of Sindhia (1726...1827), the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab (1798 - 1849), the Nizams of Hyderabad (1713 - 1948), the Nawabs and Kings of Oudh (1722 - 1856), the Nawabs of Bengal (1740 - 1770).1

2.03 True, the Maharajas of States like Cochin (Kochi) and Travancore (Thiruvithamcoor) had ruled for long centuries; but the nature and extend of their

rule and realms were somewhat restricted and curtailed. Hence it will be found that only the Great Moghals - spelt in half a dozen different ways - and the British ruled over major portions of India for somewhat lengthy periods. The Mogul rulers were in power as follows: Babur (1526 - 1530), Humayun (1530 - 56), Akbar (1556 - 1605), Jahangir (1605 - 27), Shah Jahan (1627 - deposed 1658 and died 1666), Aurangzeb Alamgir (1658 - 1707), others from 1707 to 1857 when Bahadur Shah II was deposed. And the British Governors-General from Fort William in Bengal (Warren Hastings to Lord Bentinck) (1774 -1833), Governors-General of India (1833 - 1858), Governors-General and Viceroys (1858 - 1936), Governors-General and Crown Representatives (1937 - 1947).² Thus it would be easily seen that none of these powers dominated for more than a part of, and in most cases except for the Moghals and the British, a very small part of, the 460 years for which the Society has been working in India.

2.04 During the first half of the 16th century the Indian peninsula experienced the intrusion of two vigorous foreign elements - one from across the Arabian sea and the other from the north and northwest of the subcontinent. A Vyazhavattom or dozen years after Vasco da Gama landed at Kappad near Calicut in Malabar, in 1510 the Island of Goa was occupied by the Portuguese, under Albuquerque's leadership, followed by the establishment of Portuguese power on part of the adjoining mainland, and at several points upon the coast, made possible by the almost undisputed Portuguese control of the Indian seas.³ Also the Portuguese from the very beginning adopted a frankly proselytizing policy. And the Jesuits were part and parcel of this Portuguese outfit at least from 1542, when Francis Xavier S.J. arrived in India.

2.05 Sixteen years after the occupation of Goa by the Portuguese, in 1526, Babur the first Great Mughal paved the way for his Indian conquests, at the battle of Panipat during which Ibrahim Lodi met with his death.⁴ Sixteen years after this event, in 1542, Francis Xavier arrived in India paving the way with his fellow Jesuits for another type of conquest for the greater glory of God. This work has been going on almost uninterruptedly for the past 460 years.

3.01 Not only has this work of the Jesuits been going on for four centuries and a half but it has embraced almost every part of India as we understand India today or India as it has been understood at any time in history, and even beyond it, from Cape Comorin further down in the south to even Tibet in the north.

3.02 " Of all the missionaries Europe had sent out to India, (let me quote, and at some length -) St. Francis Xavier was, undoubtedly the greatest. Scholars who profess different creeds in unison say that St. Francis Xavier was the greatest missionary of modern times. The virtues necessary for a missionary, namely an abiding love of God and undying zeal for His glory, sympathy for the poor and needy and a strong will to labour for God and fellow men, he had...He was a rare combination of the contemplative and the man of action."⁵ "While his heart was burning with the love of God, his head was busy with the work of building the Church on solid foundation. His was an organising talent of a high order."⁶

3.03 It is to be noted that even during the short period of less than ten years spent by Xavier in India between 1542 and 1552, large portions of South India in both what Marco Polo calls the Malabar Coast and the Maabar Coast i.e., the west and east coasts of India had experienced the Jesuit way producing considerable impact not only on the Christians there but also on the society there at large and even on the Maharajas and their war councils and civil administrations, right from Goa to Cochin to Cape Comorin to Manapad to Mannar to Mylapore. We see the successors of the saint like Criminali and Enriquez continuing the good work.

3.04 The famous Colegio de Santa Fe at Goa was handed over to the Jesuits. The first students of this little seminary to be ordained priests seem to have been

the three young men from Tuticorin who accompanied St. Francis Xavier to the Fishery Coast as his interpreters.⁷ In 1614, the historian of the Society of Jesus in the East, Father Sebastiao Goncalves, could write that the Santa Fe College had produced many priests...⁸ "Goa remained the centre, from which priests were sent to the various missionary areas. The local headquarters was Cochin for the Malabar Coast, Cape Comorin and the regions situated in the interior of the peninsula; Colombo for Ceylon; Mylapore for the Fishery Coast, the Coromandel Coast and the neighbouring territories; Calcutta for Bengal and Burma; Bassein for the Missions of the North; Agra for the Jesuit Missions situated in the Moghul Empire."⁹

3.05 In the beginning the Jesuits in India were divided into just two Provinces: that of the North, with Goa as its centre, and that of the South (the Malabar Province) with Cochin as its headquarters. Under the northern province came the Mission of the Great Moghul, started at the request of Emperor Akbar, with Father Rudolph Acquaviva, the future Martyr, as its first Superior. To the Southern Province belonged the Madura Mission. Started early in the seventeenth century, it counted among its members the celebrated Father Robert de Nobili, as well as Saint John de Britto.¹⁰

3.06 These two Provinces saw speedy progress and in the course of four centuries today the Jesuits have in the Republic of India itself Provincial Headquarters at Panjim, Goa; Hazaribagh, Bihar; Ahmedabad, Gujarat; Calcutta, W. Bengal; Bangalore, Karnataka; Madura-Dindigul, TNadu; Pathalgaon, M.P.; Matigara-Darjeeling; Secunderabad, A.P.; Jamshedpur, Bihar; Kozhikode, Kerala; Patna, Bihar; Delhi (Region); Mumbai, Maharashtra; Bihar - Dumka; Ranchi, Bihar; Pune, Maharashtra; and Kohima, Nagaland indicating the spread of the Society all over the country and its presence in every nook and corner of the land. The ubiquitous nature of the Society has through its varied missions become one of the most powerful influences in Indian history.¹¹ Today there is hardly any Catholic ecclesiastical division in India or any revenue district in the country for that matter which does not boast some Jesuit enterprise or other, be it a school or a college, a technical training institute or an engineering establishment, a printing press or an infirmary, a seminary or a social service centre....

4.01 One of the easiest methods to study the Jesuit presence in various fields would be to jot down the names and activities of the Jesuit institutions and organisations functioning in either the different dioceses of India or in the different revenue districts of the country. Another method would be to jot down the names of two or three dozen outstanding members of the Society down the centuries and to list their various talents and achievements. However there is time for neither now. Hence let me be content with the enumeration of the various fields where Jesuits in India have made substantial contributions whereby they have secured a place of prominence for themselves and the Catholic Church in India's history.

4.02 The spread of the Society and the Companions in time and space has been observed in some detail. The third factor which has won the Society a lasting place in the minds of the people and in the history of the nation is the large number of spheres which it has penetrated and permeated. Some of these spheres are religion and spirituality, politics, education, scientific and technological progress, warfare and diplomacy, indology, culture, language and literature, art and architecture, sports and games, discipline, morality and ethics, social reforms, tribal and aboriginal movements, dalit issues, schisms, travel and trade, nation-building, health-care, formation of youth...to mention only a few.¹²

4.03 Although a detailed consideration of the achievements of the Society in each such area is essential for the full understanding of the Society's place in Indian History as each field would require a paper for itself the author would rather not

attempt that task here.

4.04 It is obvious that the continuous existence of the Jesuits for half a millennium¹³ in India in all the places where the action was has made sure for the Society a place of pride in the History of India. And that history has been skilfully recorded by many Jesuits in India. May I take this opportunity to mention the names three such Jesuits that come to mind - whom I call the 3Hs - Hosten, Heras, and Hambye. Forgive me if I express the thought that there appears to be a certain void in the efforts of the present day Jesuits to effectively contribute to the various vineyards so efficiently nurtured by scores of their great and scholarly predecessors. May I suggest that we get together to bring out an Encyclopaedia Jesuitica Indica - excuse my Latin, Fr. Haas used to have a hard time correcting my Latin during my days at the St. Josephs, Trichy - and it continues to be Greek to me. Forgive me also if the paper has exceeded the allotted time.

Notes:

1. Michael Edwardes, *A History of India From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, New York, N. Y., 1961, p. 349 et. sq.
2. Id., *ibid.*
3. Sir Edward MacLagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, Burns Oates..., London, 1932, Introduction, p. xix.
4. M. Edwardes, *op. cit.*, p.126
5. A. M. George Jagatheesan, "Saint Francis Xavier," article in *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, Ed. George Menachery, Vol. I, Trichur, 1982, p.16. Also cf. the many articles in the same work on the saint, esp. J. M. Villarvarayan, "The Mission and Life of Saint Francis Xavier in South India," Vol. II, Trichur, 1973, pp. 65-68.
6. Soares, *The Catholic Church in India*, quoted by George Jagatheesan in the article cited.
7. cfr. *Epist. Xaver.*I, pp.127, 245. See n.22, "The Portuguese Padroado in India," article by Carlos Mercés de Melo in the *STCEI*, I, Ed. George Menachery, 1982, p.26.
8. *Historia dos religiosos da Companhia de Jesus nos reinos...da India Oriental*, c. 6. See n.23, "The Portuguese Padroado in India," article by Carlos Mercés de Melo in the *STCEI*, I, Ed. George Menachery, 1982, p.26.
9. *Memoria da Arquidiocese de Goa*, p.47.
10. De Melo, Article in *STCEI*, I, p.22, and n.31, p.26.
11. *The Catholic Directory of India*, Great Jubilee 2000 Edition, pp.1305-1306.
12. These areas are somewhat exhaustively covered by the articles, books, and extracts from books in the various volumes of *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India*, *The Indian Church History Classics*, *The Deepika Millennium Directory*, and in the *CBCI-KCBC St. Thomas and St. Xavier Double Jubilee Commemoration Volume* (in the press).

13. Excepting perhaps a few years following the demise of the last surviving Jesuit in India during the suppression of the Society.

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The Nazranies

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The Catholics II

The Christians

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